

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: CHARLES J. KELLY  
INTERVIEWER: GABE GABRIELSKY  
DATE: MARCH 2, 1989  
PLACE: WESTERN GATEWAY HERITAGE STATE PARK**

**G = GABE  
C = CHARLES**

**SG-NA-TO24**

G: This is Gabe Gabrielsky in my office at the Western Gateway Heritage State Park on March 2, 1989. We're interviewing Charles Kelly for the Shifting Gears Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts 1920-1980 Oral History Project.

I'm going to sort of start out with some general background questions. Uh, where were you born?

C: In North Adams.

G: When were you born?

C: 1933. May 19th, 1933.

G: Uh, where were your grandparents from?

C: Three of them were from Ireland and uh, were born in Ireland. They you know, they came here in the young age. And one came into this earth in Illinois, moved east.

G: Uh huh. Um, do you remember your grandparents?

C: Uh, yes. All of, all except my uh, my grandfather on my mother's side. I was very young when he died.

G: What did, what did your grandparents do for a living?

C: Um, the one (--) My grandfather Kelly worked in at the Electric Company.

G: Electric Utilities?

C: Electric Utilities, yeah. And uh, my grandfather Doran I'm not sure. He might have been in one of the mills, but I'm, he I'm not positive.

G: Your grandfather Kelly, do you know what he did for the Electric Company?

C: Uh, no, not exactly. I know it was the Electric Company. Meter reader, or (--)

G: Uh huh, yeah. You know he worked there, but not what his actual job was.

C: What his actual job was, no.

G: Um, did your grandparents, or people of their generation, people older than your parents uh, do you have any recollection of, of uh, stories that they told you, or any, anything like that? Especially stories about their youth?

C: Not, not really. Uh, we lived with uh, or right next to and then with my uh, grandmother Doran, but really don't remember that many stories. My other grandparents we didn't see that often, but uh, [G: uh huh] no I don't recall any of the stories.

G: Uh, what did your parents do for a living?

C: My father [clears throat] worked for the City of North Adams for most of his life as a truck driver and then as a, man the office at the city yard stores keeper. You know, ordering salt sand and all the materials [unclear], [G: uh huh] and things like that later on. And my mother uh, for a lot of years um, just a homemaker. And then um (--) I shouldn't say just a homemaker in today's world. [Laughs] They get angry. Uh, and then uh, later on, after my parents were divorced she opened and manned a hat store her in North Adams, a millinery store. Women's hats.

G: Uh, what um, what are your own earliest memories?

C: Well I lived on [Kent?] Avenue here in North Adams and uh, memories of uh, going to the [unclear] Lake. You know, being in that area and (--)

G: Any particular season?

C: Well summer. [G: Summer] Summer and you know, going to the lake with my older brothers and sisters.

G: How old were you then?

C: Oh god, you know, three or four years old. Something like that.

G: Uh, so we're talking about the mid thirties then. [C: Yeah] The late thirties.

C: Mid to late thirties. And going to uh, starting into kindergarten at the old Mark Hopkin School. And then remember the old school and being (--) Then it was torn down and they built a new one. And our next door neighbor was the janitor there and we got, got all the blocks you know, from the kindergarten. You know, play, a lot of play things out the uh, out of the school. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] Blocks the kids in kindergarten used to use. And that, I guess that is my earliest recollection.

G: So you went to the old Mark Hopkin School. Where else did you (--)

C: Just very, very, I think just for the kindergarten year.

G: And then where did you go to school?

C: Into the new Mark Hopkin School. They built it (--)

G: That went through what grades? Fifth, sixth?

C: Uh, the twelfth.

G: That went all the way?

C: Yes. North Adams was uh, K through twelve up until uh, I don't know, about fifteen years ago when [end of comment unclear].

G: So you never went to Drury?

C: Oh yes I went to (--) Oh, no, I went to uh, I'm sorry, eight grade. [G: Yeah] Then I went to Drury as a freshman and to the old North Adams Trade School, the [name unclear] McCann Vocational School [G: Uh huh] for three years.

G: So you went, you went to, to Drury for, the old Drury [C: the old Drury, yes] for a year and then you went to a trade school [unclear]?

C: To the (--) Well it was actually in Drury. It was all, all in one building.

G: Oh, it was a section of Drury.

C: It was a section of Drury and Charles McCann who this vocational school is named after [G: uh huh] after had, had fifteen sophomores, fifteen juniors and fifteen seniors in the what we called Trade School at the time, but it was strictly a, a machine shop process, what they were calling machine tech, [G: Uh huh] a course at McCann now, but we just call it the machine shop course. And they train machinist and toolmakers. [G: Uh huh] And uh, that was the only, the only course they had, because Charlie was a uh, was a toolmaker. [G: Umhm] I assume that was why and that's the trade they had. And my Uncle James [Dorn?] was my shop instructor.

[G: Uh huh] Before, he was a toolmaker also. Lou Diamond, the former Mayor of North Adams was the uh, our uh, english and history, and our classroom teacher, [G: uh huh] math, english, history, things like that.

G: So that's where you learned your trade?

C: That's where I started learning my trade. And then I served an apprenticeship at Sprague Electric. [G: Uh huh] It might be, it's worth noting here that uh, Charlie McCann, I know a lot of schools are named after people, but he certainly deserved it, because in those days anyone that graduated from our Trade School he went out and got them a job. [G: Uh huh] He, if any (--) If they wanted it he placed just about every boy out of there and uh, myself, he placed me into the uh, the toolmaking apprenticeship at Sprague Electric. And I've been there ever since.

G: Uh huh. So that's, you, you, you went into Sprague Electric right from (--)

C: Uh, in September. I graduated in June, went in in September as a, an apprentice toolmaker.

G: Was that your first job at Sprague?

C: The first real full time job, I worked for the state during the summer [G: uh huh] and uh, had a few odd jobs you know, [unclear].

G: Doing road work it seems?

C: Uh, yes, working on the road crew. But that was only a summer job and I knew that uh, I was going to (--)

G: So that must have been 1951 or? [C: '52] '52. Uh, it's just about the middle or towards the end of the Korean War. Were you uh, subject to the draft, or anything?

C: No. As a uh, as a tool and dye maker apprentice you were draft exempt. It's an educational thing. [G: Uh huh] Uh, even during World War II toolmakers were uh, were draft exempt because of the uh, well you don't, the people who are making the guns, you don't put them in the army. You've got to (--) Somebody's got to make the guns. [G: Right] But that's, that was considered an educational thing and uh, [G: Uh huh] and as I say, toolmakers were, even in World War II were not drafted.

G: Um, so.

C: I was never in National Guard. I could have gone through the guard, but not being drafted. [Laughs] [G: Umhm] I joined when I was a junior in high school.

G: You, you joined the National (--)

C: National Guard was junior in high school.

G: You were quite young then right?

C: Well I was eighteen, seventeen or eighteen. [G: Yeah] And uh, a friend of (--) They had a recruiting drive and one of my friends was [unclear] happen to sign up. [G: Uh huh] But as I say, I was draft exempt. I wouldn't have been drafted, but I could have gone through the guard if I was called.

G: Right.

C: Something like Dan Quayle. [Laughs]

G: Um, describe uh, when you started to work at Sprague, what was that job like? Where was it and what (--) Describe a day. What a day was like when you first started working.

C: Well it, it was at uh, at the old Marshall Street Plant. [G: Uh huh] It was a large, a good size tool room.

G: What building was that?

C: In Building 7 I think. Uh, I don't really know all of the numbers of the rooms. I think it's Building 7. And uh (--)

G: Would you remember if you were there? [C: Huh?] Would you remember (--)

C: I know the buildings, yeah. I know the whole, the plant very well. I just didn't know, you know, they numbered them I think later on [G: Right] to tell you the truth. Uh, I know I worked a lot of years, seventeen years in Building 4, at the Research Center machine shop, but I you know, but I'm pretty sure the machine shop was Building 7. And uh, it was quite a large, there was about forty men in the tool room at that time. And uh, quite large. We were assigned to older toolmakers to learn the trade that way. And uh, you know, building jigs and fixtures and doing repair work out on the production machines that we built. And uh, we had a um (--) I mean is that what you're looking for, or?

G: Not quite, because that you know, that's sort of like (--) Well what does that mean? What is that about? If you could be a little more um, specific and a little more detailed. [C: Well] I know that, I mean a lot of technical terms you might use wouldn't be particularly useful for me, because I would understand it. [C: I see] But still I mean, I know what a lathe looks like. [C: Yeah] What are you doing you know?

C: Yeah, okay. Well what we did was we uh, supported the production areas. And we made, if they were, (--) The women who were head of assembly jigs, who assemble the capacitors, we made the jigs, or the uh, the thing that they used to assemble it, we made (--)

G: You made the jigs with the toolmaker.

C: We made the jigs. Yeah, we made the jigs.

G: What, what, what did that involve actually, the making of it? What did you have to do? Did you have to cut metal, [C: oh yeah, yes, depending what it made] or put it on a, put it on a lathe [unclear] metal?

C: Yeah, put it on a lathe, or milling machine, grinder, whatever. [G: Uh huh] And we made uh, all the dyes they needed for their, the can that they put them in. If they had to have a slot in a can, or a square for one of the terminals to stick through, you made the dyes that punched out the uh, [G: uh huh] the hole in the can and then they assemble it into the can. [G: Umhm] And we made you know, all of the tools and fixtures for the uh, for the assembly line for the testing and uh (--)

G: What, what uh, how did you start and what was the (--) When you were an apprentice what was the distinction between what you were doing and what a uh, journeyman was doing?

C: Oh okay. Well we had a lot of the simple jobs you know, making uh, uh, some of the simple jigs and fixtures and uh, and doing some of the repair work. Whereas the, the older men, the uh, high class tool and dye makers were doing all of the (--) Well building the dyes, the gauges to check everything with, which was close uh, tolerance work and (--)

G: Did you, when you were an apprentice, did you work under a um, a machinist, or under a supervisor? Under someone in management, or under a machinist?

C: We, we worked under uh, supervisors to you know, handed the work and they checked us, but lots of times we were assigned to a uh, an older tool and dye maker [G: uh huh] to help them with something. If he was building a dye we would build some of the simple parts with it and see how he was progressing with the uh, other, other parts of it. And that's how we learned a lot of our trade. Plus, (--)

G: How long, how long were you in that position?

C: [Clears throat] I think I served three years. It's a four year apprenticeship, but they gave us a year off for the schooling that we had at, at the trade school. [G: Umhm] And uh, the, a lot of apprentice courses do that. They, they're basically in this state they want a four year apprenticeship, or the equivalency, and they will give you time off if you, for your schooling. [Coughs] And, but that is strictly up to the local uh, management. If they want to give, stick with the four year, stick with the four. If you, if they feel they want to give you some time, they will. But ours, later on our apprenticeship was a strict four year. We had a lot of apprentices come through our courses out of the present McCann School, and they, they made it mandatory four years.

G: Umhm. Um, do you or did you go to church?

C: Yes, I uh, I'm a fine Irish Catholic boy. [G: Uh huh] We uh, I've always gone to church uh, started with my family. And I, I continue to go to church and regularly, you know, very regularly every Sunday. And uh, communion.

G: Where is that where you go to church?

C: Saint Francis Parish in North Adams. [G: Uh huh] Saint Francis of Asisi.

G: But you, you live in Vermont right?

C: I live in Clarksburg, Massachusetts.

G: Oh you live in Clarksburg. Uh huh. [C: Yes] Uh, but your parents were divorced right?

C: Yes they were.

G: I presume that they never were remarried.

C: Neither one of them remarried, no. [G: Yeah] It was, in those days it was much more traumatic than today.

G: Yeah, yeah, I can imagine. What's one of the interesting things that I'm finding and I just, a number of these interviews have been conducted by young, by young students who uh, never took issue with this. But, and then, then I started to find that a least half the interviews uh, that I've taken are with catholic people that have divorce somewhere in their immediate family. Some of whom have been remarried. I mean when that comes up, I know you know, I come from a little older generation when you know, you know, it was never thought of and considered.

C: You never thought of it in those days.

G: Yeah. And so I always [C: coughs] try and pursue that, that question because I, I think it's interesting [few words unclear].

C: Of course a lot of it is the changing views of the church. [G: Yeah] They will give annulments now so you can remarry. [G: yes] And instead of losing catholics they're bending the rules a little bit. [G: Right, yeah, but] As uh, I don't know if you are catholic, but uh, there's [unclear].

G: No I'm not, but there, I had a lot of catholic friends and certainly when I was younger, when I was very young I mean that was unheard of to be (--) And I, I'm finding a surprising number of people who I'm interviewing who are catholics and have had divorced somewhere in their family. And I think it's a little, you know, I'm wondering if I just have a peculiar example of what's going on, which is why I, I pursue the question [unclear]. Um, so you immediately started working at Marshall Street. [C: Yes] That was your first place that you started working? Um, how did you, what was the process of your becoming a, a full fledged toolmaker? I mean you, you served as apprenticeship for three years and then was there any sort of right of passage or anything? [C: Well we] Was it just reflected in your paycheck, [C: oh yes] or responsibilities, or what?

C: Yeah, yeah. They uh, it was in the paycheck, in responsibilities and uh, you still had to climb the ladder so to speak. You were, you graduated at a rate here maybe in somewhere on the ladder and you took years to get to the top of the ladder. So you know, the different classification of uh, um, in our (--) We had different terminology in our shop. We called it, we had maintenance machinists, machinists, toolmakers, then dye makers, a b c dye makers. So you had a progression and each step with a pay raise up to the top.

G: So what was your, when you stopped being an apprentice what, what title did you get?

C: I think I was a uh, uh, a B Class Machinist probably, in this, in this progression. Could have been any, you know. [G: Sure] In other, in other shops, in other companies, it could have been something else. And then I started to climb to the uh, you know, to the top of the uh, [G: umhm] of the ladder.

G: What uh, did you have (--) How did your job change? I mean how was it? Was it different? Was that (--) A couple of things. First of all, I mean when I, when you stop being an apprentice to being a journeyman [C: yeah] to me that would strike me as a big change. Did it strike you as a big change? And how was it? Were their bigger changes?

C: Uh, there were uh, the change was uh, was very small, because you were just, you wouldn't have as much supervision and you would go out on your own more. And that's about it. [G: Uh huh] But by that time you were capable of doing it. [G: Right] You were still basically doing your, when you first got, when you got out of it the last work, year of your apprenticeship and the first year you get out basically you were doing about the same work, but without the supervision, without always working, or not always working but sometimes working with other people. Now you were more on your own basically.

G: So are you suggesting that the increments of change on your job was so small that they were never big [unclear]?

C: At, at (--) There was no big dramatic thing at that point. [G: Uh huh] Uh, later on you know, uh, you would uh, when you got into the other higher grades you would be doing more skilled work, more uh, [G: Umhm] closer tolerance work [unclear]. [Coughs]

G: Was there, was there ever any point where there were really fundamental changes in the work process which had not really very much to do with your skills or anything, but which changed, which changed your work, uh, the nature of your work? [C: Oh yes] New machines, or (--)

C: Yes. And uh, when uh, I've heard the machines themselves changed.

G: Yeah, that's (--)

C: And this is what we're looking. Uh, when, I know you don't know about a planner, or a shaper. [G: I know] Okay. When, when we started we had (--) [G: my grandfather was a machinist] Okay. But when we, when I first started they, it was uh, you still got big chunks of material and you had to cut it out, you know, hog it right down, [G: Sure, (unclear)] and shape it



right down. And, and then you make your part. Now when, as of like now, they're buying tools they'll ground to size. And you, lots of times the designers will build a machine and all you got to do is put holes in it, accurately maybe, but you know, you don't have all of these, all this machine work anymore. Unless you're cutting uh, cutting pieces off into uh, you know, different designs you would uh, basically you'd take a piece of stock and may have to square off the ends and puts some holes into it, or, or do small things. Where before we had to take a big chunk of stock and just get it down to size first. Now, now they're buying, buying our uh, our steel and just about everything else, you know, already, already pretty close to size what we're going to use it.

G: How do you feel about that?

C: Like it. [G: You like it] Yes, very much so. Uh, hardening, I do the hardening now uh, for the, for the company, you know, for our shop. [G: Uh huh] [Clears throat] And uh, I haven't been doing it for that long, but when I first started doing it everything was real hard, and everything now we're is air hardening, much cleaner. And it's uh, much easier to do, much (--) [Unclear] hardening process is much simpler. The work comes out of the furnace just about ready to just polish up a little bit and you can use it. Whereas before you had to grind everything. Now everything had, they had to come up with a heavy scale on it. It was hard. And then you had to, then again machine it down to different sizes, because of the uh, because of the uh, where you'd been processing and hardening it. So a lot of things have changed. We have uh, um, in replacing the old shapers and planers we have um EDM machines, Electrical Discharge Machines that burn holes in the stock, or dye for hardened pieces for uh, that we couldn't do before. Uh, numerical control machines. Uh, we only have, we don't have that many at Sprague's now, but uh, we do have that, which is, which is a good change. The next, the next change is going to be real dramatic.

G: You don't, you don't really have a lot of numerical control [unclear].

C: No, I have one at Sprague, we have in our shop. That's it.

G: Uh huh. Because I have read some [unclear] about machinists who don't like that very much.

C: Well it's (--) You've got to program it and then uh (--) The problem, they have an awful problem now is that the uh, a lot, and the things is that the uh, it's a different, it's a silverstain trade. You need a toolmaker to know what you've got to do, [G: right] but you also need a computer expert to do it. [Laughs] [G: Yeah, yeah] And a, and a, and a, and a, and a guy that's a uh, well and again in vocational schools they're teaching it. And so you're getting the tool uh, work plus they're getting the computer stuff so they can program and everything. [G: Umhm] It's going to be much easier for the new generation. [G: I see] But right now it's, it's difficult.

G: So there's a problem in transition.

C: The transition right now and some of the older toolmakers, yeah.

G: Umhm. Um, when did you first become active in uh, the union?

C: Basically it was after the strike in '70. I think in 1973 was my first uh, uh negotia (--) You know, being on a negotiating committee and uh, being a steward and that.

G: That's quite awhile. I mean you've been there for twenty years.

C: Well I've been in it now, I've been in it twenty years now. Either as a steward, negotiating committee, or now as president and on a negotiating committee.

G: Uh huh. [C: umhm] Um, what, what, at the time that you became active, you'd been working there twenty years and hadn't been active. [C: Well I was, yeah] What, uh what motivated you to become active in the union?

C: I, well just the uh, I guess it just came with age. The uh, I got interested in the uh, you know, the union activity more. And, and when I first started you really didn't (--) There, (--) I was a young fellow in with a bunch of older men and they kept electing, nominating and electing you know, people they knew for years who were doing it for years. And there was a big turnover at that time and I was getting to be one of the middle age, or older people and I got involved with it.

G: So did uh, (--)

C: I don't know if you know (--) Well maybe, if this is a good point or not, where you talked about after the strike in '70, that the uh, the reason we have our union is because they broke away from the old (--)

G: The old, the old ICW.

C: ICW. And in '49 they had a nine month strike to break away from our, our machine shop. [G: Right] Our group. And that's how we uh, we wound up here.

G: You wanted to go with the (--)

C: We wanted our own uh, our own group, because we weren't being represented well. We uh, you know, we were dominated by the women and they want, there were things we wanted they didn't care about and we were always out-voted. So we got our own union and believe me it uh (--)

G: And you were the first AFL-CIO Union.

C: We were the first International Union there. And, and for a long time. [G: Yeah] From '49 to 7 uh, '67 I guess it was. [G: Yeah] And uh, and over the years it's benefited us very much, because we, we have our own language, we have much higher pay scale and everything even more than the other skilled workers such as your maintenance people, plumbers, electricians and that, because they are still stuck in that union with being out-voted by the women. And they want this and they you know, their pay scale has suffered for it and ours has advanced. And I was very, we owe a lot to the people that went out, our chartered members that went out and

broke away. It took them a long hard strike, but it's been very beneficial for the people who came after.

G: There was a lot of cooperation down in the 1970 strike between all three unions.

C: Yes there was. Well our, our group was the only one who was out 100%. There was a lot of strike breakers in the office and the IUE. [G: Uh huh] Much bigger union, but our, our group was uh, I don't know how big it was at the time, but it was around fifty, but they were out there by 100%.

G: Is your Local, your Lodge, is the [unclear] of Brown Street the only bargaining unit of your Lodge, or does it represent other uh, (--)

C: Like what do you mean?

G: Well there's sometimes unions are what, what are called the [malgamated?] Locals.

C: No, they're still in ours until (--) We are the only one. The other two unions are connected uh, they're separate locals. Ours, the people at Brown Street, we have the only two. [G: Uh huh] But they're still in our group and under our rules. [G: I see] And they have uh, they have two more holidays. Didn't lose their vacation, didn't take a pay-cut. See they're still working under our agreement. And that's, I guess it's old now. So they're, it's going to come to a head pretty quick.

G: So it sounds like what you're telling me is that, that uh, whether you want it to or not, the uh, the union, your union when you were young was a kind old boy network. It was not real easy for a young kid to, to participate and work more comfortable at least.

C: Yeah, and and and, well and put it this way too, and then I don't think you know, when you're young you weren't really that interested in it, uh, in getting involved. There was a big transition in the uh, in the late 60's.

G: I, I guess you would hear about that. [C: what's that] Well James Carey who later became the head of the IUE was the, was secretary/treasurer of the CIO when he was twenty-five years old. [Laughs]

C: Yeah, well, you're right. But in our group, no they didn't. Finally the young group did, did take over and it was around in uh, around the '70, around '68, '69 and '70, in that area. [G: Right] The younger group did, did force its way in and take over. And uh, actually Ray Bass was the president of the IUE right today was our, [G: right] his father was the president when I was there. And uh, [G: right, he talks about that.] (--) Who, Ray, young Ray does? [G: Yes] Yeah. And he was the president. And uh, he (--)

G: His father and his uncle were not on speaking terms for some time, because Charlie Bass was in [C: with the ICO], doing things with the ICW.

C: Well actually there's more of a family tie than that. At one time uh, Ray Bass and Jack Boulger are cousins. [G: Uh huh. Gee, I didn't hear that. That's interesting] And I'll let you know, there's things they're not telling you. Maybe Jack didn't want to admit it. [Laughs] Don't let Ray hear that. But anyway and Jack's brother Michael was president of our union. There are two, there's two brothers and a cousin that were president of all three unions at uh, at Sprague's at one time. [G: Uh huh] Uh, but Ray (--)

G: Did you have, do you have relatives who were, who were active in the union? [C: No.] No.

C: No. I had, I had uncles that were, were toolmakers. And you know, inherited tools and that's one of the reasons I got into it. My, as I said, before my Uncle James Doran, his family owns the carpet place down here, was the shop teacher at the old trade school [G: uh huh] and that's how I got involved with the uh, going into the trade and through him. And going into the trade school up there.

G: Uh, did friendship (--) In terms of how friends were made at Marshall Street, did you make, would you say that most of your friends in that period when you were working at Marshall Street, were most of your friends uh, from the job, or from elsewhere, from off the job?

C: From off, off the job. [G: Uh huh] And uh, well it's still that way. I (--) There was four of us that came out of my class at trade school that went in. We were friendly, but we were not, we did not [clears throat] hang around together at night. I was active in athletics and played football, and baseball, and basketball. And most of my friends in high school, closer friends even when I was in the trade school were from the other part of the high school that I played ball with and I went to grammar school with. You know, I knew. [G: Uh huh] And uh, and today uh, they're still, my closer friends are from that group other than a few in the shop. I mean there's a guy I worked with, just retired the other day that I play golf with. You know, we're partners you know, twice a week. And uh, you know, things like that. But I'm not, but basically my [G: your closest] most of my closer friends are from outside of the shop. [G: Uh huh] And uh, and again it was, I think one of the reasons was because I was active in the, in the sporting, [unclear] sporting teams. I made friends there.

G: Uh huh, what kind of sports?

C: Oh I played uh, uh, football, basketball and baseball in the high school. And then after, even after I was playing softball with a lot of guys that were, that I went to school with other than fellows in the shop and I was friendly with that group, see. So this is, was one of the reasons I was not as close to the uh, (--)

G: Do you still do sports?

C: I, my, I go to my sons meeting and things like this. I play golf [G: uh huh] as I previously mentioned. [G: Yeah] But I don't uh (--)

G: Where's the golf course?

C: There's several. Very good area for golf course. I play at [Wobeka?] in Williamstown. There's [name unclear] at Williams College Course is excellent. One of the best in the state. North Adams Country Club, Stanford, Skyline in Lanesboro. There's a (--)

G: You play all of these courses?

C: Play mainly Wobeka. I've played them all. You know, in the course of the year I may play three or four of them.

G: Uh, how are, (--) Friends (--) Did you make friends? I'm not saying [unclear]. Did you make friends at work? Uh, what, and what kind of friends. How was, what was the basis of making friends at work?

C: Well uh, as I said, when I started there were, it was an older group. They just started the apprenticeship again. And there was four of us that came out of the trade school, we were very young. Eighteen, nineteen years old. And then the next group was in their thirties. So we were you know, we (--) [G: So you hung out?] It wasn't, it wasn't a good situation that we would become close friends with the older people because they were just a different age group.

G: So you, you hung out with these guys who graduated from McCann's with?

C: No, no. [G: Unclear] I, I was more friendly on the job, friendly with them and (--) No, we were friendly with the other people, but it wasn't uh, you know, they were a much different age group. [G: Uh huh] And an older age group. And I was in Sprague Electric out on production areas, office areas, there was a lot of friends that I had from high school that I was friendly with them too in, in the plant, but not necessarily right in the shop. [Comment unclear]

G: Um, what (--) Especially during the period that you were at Marshall Street, you know, describe uh, can you describe your relationship to your supervisors and bosses, and your feelings about the company?

C: Uh, well the first time I was there, I was there for four years in this period when I was an apprentice. [G: Umhm] And uh, my first superintendent was uh, a man name Tuffy Randal. A real, you know, older man from you know, the old school. And uh, you know, never really that close. He wasn't there that long. And not too close to him. The direct foreman was a man name Lewis [Wolbrant?] who was a vocational school teacher out of Pittsfield. And I think he had a better relationship with the younger fellows. You know, because he taught school and he uh, and he uh, you know, uh, knew, worked with young children, young people before. [G: Umhm] And he was, I think was much easier to work with him. The uh older man was not as directly involved with us, with us, but he wasn't, he was hard to get to know.

G: Umhm. Uh, you, you talked about when you became involved in the union and a little bit why. [Unclear] like to, I'd like to think more about that. [C: About why?] About why, but yeah, it's sort of, I'm not um, (--) [phone rings] [C: Well I] I don't want to give you a hard time. [C: No, I, I] But just to say well, because that part of my life doesn't, it's not quite satisfying to me. [Laughs]

C: Well okay. I uh, well there was a change-over. [G: Uh huh] And you know, I had been vice president.

G: There's was going to be changing of the guard.

C: Yeah. Basically a changing of the guard and I, I was one of the fellows that moved in. [G: Uh huh] And basically I was in uh, in the high school and not just in the trade school, in the whole high school I was, I was vice president of my senior class. And president of the [Hywai] Club and you know. So I was(--)

G: So you, so the class says (--)

C: I was involved in things like that. And I said, well this is (--)

G: You had done civic activities.

C: Yeah, I had done things. And I said, uh, in, well I wouldn't say leadership you know, but I've been president, vice president of the class and president of [Hywai?] and played sports. And I you know, I'd get involved. And I thought I could uh, could do it. You know, [G: yeah] deal with the company and, and uh, I wasn't afraid to speak up. And uh, never had been. And so I thought maybe this was my motivation more than a real strict interest in the union, because I'm always getting [unclear] at the district and everything, because I'm republican and they're all democrats. [Laughs] [G: Uh huh] My, you know, the International Rep we have a very good relationship, but he's always you know, you republicans. And you know, and I say, I keep telling when [unclear] took in a republican as you know, union president. [G: Yeah] You know, and things like this. See, but the, but the (--) I'm, you know, I get ribbed by him, but uh, you know.

G: Umhm. Um, but besides sort of you know, why you got and when you got involved and if there's (--) I mean how many ways can you ask this? Or how did you get involved in the union? I mean what, what actually happened? Like what, you know, there were certain decisions that were made and then you became more active. What was, what was the process? How did you become involved?

C: I, I you know, I don't really recall. I just seem to think that it was, you know, all of the older people were gone. [G: Okay, let] And then, and I, I thought that I could do, do the job. You know basically I thought I could do a better job than some of the people and I, I ran for office. You know uh (--)

G: What was the first position that you held?

C: I think I might have been treasurer to start with. [G: Uh huh] And then I went to uh, the steward and then to the negotiating committee. I've been on the negotiating committee ever since '73. [G: Uh huh] But I also was a shop steward a couple of years previous to that. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] And uh, but mainly I was in, involved with the uh, either as a first steward who was automatically on the negotiating committee, or an elected delegate to the uh, the uh,

negotiating committee, or our shop committee, executive committee, whatever you want to call it, you know.

G: Umhm. When did you become president?

C: I've been president about five years now. About '83 or '84.

G: What, what were the circumstances of your becoming president? Did your predecessor (--)

C: Nobody else wanted the job. [Laughs]

G: Your predecessor retired?

C: Uh, one of them uh, uh, two, the two previous guys were still there at the time. One of them had, was, you know, new he was going to be let go with the big cutback. But uh, I had been first steward and, and uh, I guess I was just about the logical choice to go up. You know I had been active in it and uh, (--)

G: Don't the officers have super seniority?

C: We have, we have our president and our first two stewards. And right now because our um, you know, group is going, is decreasing which we've, we've ourselves have cut it back to the president and the first steward. [G: Uh huh] And that is only in case of layoff. [G: Right] Uh, you can be bumped from job locations and things only in a layoff. And uh, to my knowledge no one has ever taken it, used it. Also to my knowledge we've never been to arbitration. We've had an International since '49. Always been able to work it out with the company. Worked our problems out and sometime we'd win and sometime we'd lose, but we've never brought a case to arbitration, whereas the other two unions are there every other week. Especially the IUE. And I'm not knocking the IUE, but it is a fact. That they, they have had a lot of problems resolving their(--)

G: Uh, describe the working conditions, especially at Marshall Street. I mean what uh (--)

C: Again uh, you mean cleanliness of the shop, or just getting along with the management?

G: Uh, [C: we've always had a good] I'm not thinking so much of, because I've asked you about that. You know, both you know, your peers in the shop and management. But the actual, what the conditions of work are like, or were like actually. [C: Yeah] You know, the uh, uh, presumably there were grievances about a variety of things. And sometimes there might have been (--)

C: Yeah, there were, there were grievances, but uh (--)

G: Were, for example were there, were there health issues, were there safety issues, were uh, you know (--)

C: Uh, very few. One time they wanted the men's room cleaned up and a new fresh coat of paint put on the wall. [G: Uh huh] A few times over [unclear] uh, grinders and things you know, for the dust. [G: Uh huh] But we, we went, it was done. [G: Yeah] And it was uh, basically as far as I'm concerned work conditions always have been pretty good for our group at Sprague Electric. Now again, not talking for the rest of them, we, we always got along pretty well with the management, especially um, uh, you know, after the transition era, after the you know, late sixties I think uh a lot older group.

G: Well you say that things were pretty good. What, what do you (--)

C: Well there's still a lot of animosity in our shop after (--) They had a, the older group, there were thirty charter members. And most of them were all there when I went in. And there was a few, at that time there was a few scabs. Uh, there was none in '70. But uh, there was some animosity in the shop up until, from '52 up until a lot of the old guard left. There are still some scabs working the shop and the older men, and there was a lot of um, tension at that. But after, after the uh, (--) You know, again, after um, the late sixties when a lot of the new people came in it was just uh, a real good place to work I, I thought.

G: Um, well you talk about uh, that you were able to resolve problems fairly, fairly easily with the, with the company.

C: Well yes. We, I, we have not had a uh, even a third step grievance in about three or four years, our group.

G: Um, what do you ascribe that to? I mean it strikes me that that could be, it could be a number of things. Maybe a combination of things. It might be an enlightened management. It might be that you're real tough. It might be a combination of both [C: laughs] of those things. Uh (--)

C: We're tough.

G: You know it might be the nature of your work.

C: Uh, a lot, a lot (--) I think, I think, I think it's the nature of my work. We had the, when the other groups went, of course they're a bigger group. Now we have a smaller group. Uh, we didn't pick on petty things prim (--) uh, basically. I mean there may have been a few over the years. Uh, we, we uh, they did not have any in our trade other than our own shop foreman. And mainly we solved it with our, our own, solved our problem within our group meeting with our foreman and our superintendent who knew the trade. And when there was a few things that we did go up about, uh, they you know, we'd go to the uh IR Manager and maybe the labor lawyer and things like that. Uh, basically they had to mostly rely on our, on our management, because if it was something pertaining to trade they knew nothing about it. And I think that, a lot of it was that it was uh (--)

G: The fact that you were from a highly skilled trade.



C: For a highly skilled trade. And we didn't go after petty things. They knew if (--) I think what I'll give them credit for, when they knew we had a grievance, we did have a bitch. Now some, we didn't win them all, but some we did and some we didn't. And we uh, they were always resolved to uh, (--) The ones we lost, say okay. We will look at it and say, can we win this in arbitration? We may have a shot, we may win and we may lose. It's going to cost a lot of money. Smaller group, smaller treasury. [G: Umhm] You know, sometimes that was a factor.

G: You choose not to do it right?

C: Yeah, we choose not to do it. We might have, we might have won it, but it wasn't that important. If there was a big issues, yes, we definitely would have gone. The IUE with their hundred thousand dollars said, hey, we're going to fight anyway. Make the company go and pay and then you know. So we didn't have that, that attitude. [Clears throat] Uh, but again uh, I think because it was just the one trade and just a certain group. And we didn't, we tried not to be, we tried to settle things on a first or second step and tried not to be petty. And I think, and not just us I mean the management too. We work pretty well together that way.

G: How, how big is uh, the, your membership today?

C: Today it's eleven people. [G: Uh huh] At one time it was over [seventeen or seventy?]

G: Um, and that uh, and uh, what are, what do you (--) What are your feelings? What is your relationship to the International Union? What are your feelings about the International Union, your relationship to the union?

C: I, our, we have had real great representation. Anytime we, even though with a small group now, even with eleven people, I'll call my International Rep. He'll say, I'll get a couple of dates. You know, this is the days I can be free. We'd set up with the company, he'll be here for eleven people. And uh, the, we've always had great representation. Uh, and I think that's another reason why we've done well money wise and negotiation language wise, because we've always had (--) I don't know if you (--) Well you probably know more about the IAM than I do if you've been studying uh, labor.

G: That's my field okay. [Chuckles]

C: Okay. But it's, it always, it was an old crafts union [G: yeah] and uh, you know, their old space and everything. And there's about eight hundred (--)

G: [Unclear] industrial union now.

C: What's that?

G: They have a lot of industrial shops now.

C: They do now, yeah. But we, when it was started it was always an old [unclear] crafts union. [G: Right] And it was always, it's always been very clean. [G: Yeah] You know, they have the

good reputation. There's about eight hundred thousand people now. There's been over a million. It's a big union. A lot of money. And you know, their research department, we have a problem we send it uh, our Nat. Rep. will send it to Washington and the lawyers, whoever, their accountant, everything is checked out even for a little group like us. And it's been very, it's been great.

G: Yeah, yeah.

C: And a lot of people in here don't realize that you know, or even in our company, that hey, you've got a little union there. Our union is three times bigger than the IUE. [G: Right] And an International [unclear], in the after union, I think they rented a foreigner in our building in Washington from us for years. They didn't have an office, you know, [unclear] of their own.

G: Yeah, they were very small, about seventy thousand.

C: So they rented, they rented, they rented a space from us in our building in the White House. [G: Yeah] So that the people here don't realize that. That uh (--) [G: Uh huh] But our, but the [unclear] have been great to us. As I say, you probably know more about it than I do. [Comment unclear]

G: Uh, well there's some things that are, that are, that are unavoidable in terms of the IAM. Um, uh Whimpy's probably one of the most flamboyant american labor leaders in history, certainly today [C: Yes] in any event.

C: He uh, he's all done.

G: Yeah, he's retired.

C: Yeah, he's got to retire. He's mandatory retirement.

G: Right. Nevertheless I mean you've been president for a number of years while he's been very sort of, I always am hearing him on the radio and television and (--)

C: I don't agree with his political jokes.

G: Yeah.

C: I think that's the point you're making?

G: You know, obviously when you say you're republican and Whimpy goes out of his way to tell everybody he's a socialist, uh, it's obvious that you would disagree with, with him about a lot of things.

C: Oh, most uh, most old union leaders were socialists then, [G: yeah] let's face it.

G: But uh, and so he's kind of a throw back in that way. Uh, I'm sort of getting a broader issue

that um, in general, whether it's [unclear] or anybody, uh, do you think it's appropriate for union leaders to take public stands along political issues? [C: I, I] Whether you agree with them or not.

C: Okay. [G: Laughs] I guess it's America and they can do what they want. I, I don't think there's this uh, this uh, old uh, party line where you can deliver the votes like the Daily used to, and the Union Leaders used to. People have all like you know, a lot of unions that people didn't go to high school before. Now they can read and write and uh, they make their own mind. They watch the news on TV, or hear cross fires, [unclear], whatever. And you know, you make our own decisions. And there's not the uh, they don't have the power they used to. And when it comes to most issues, you know, bringing their members with them, there are still certain things you know, like this think with Eastern Airlines. And you know, stick together and stuff. Sure we have that. And the unions are, I still think they're necessarily. We've (--) The big problem with the decline, they're down to 20%, is that uh, or less than 20% probably, [G: That's 17 actually] yeah whatever, uh, is that uh, hey, is we, they've won all of these things and they're there. Now the kids are saying, hey, what do I need a union for? I've got the holidays, I've got the forty hour week and that, but it was unions that got it. And if they did away with it, they'd have to (--)

side one ends

side two begins.

Begins with Charles [Informant] in mid-sentence:

C: A lot of the uh, businesses and that. And the threat of the union is still there. And uh, and I don't like the use the word "threat", but I guess that's what it is. But they did win a lot of things. I know uh, a lot of things we have that uh, you know, time and a half for overtime. And talking to my mother-in-law and what she did in the hat mills. You know, work twelve hours a day for a couple of cents an hour. I mean that's (--) And I guess everybody at that time, but they've come a long way and I, and it helped built this country. And uh, you know, they, they were necessary.

G: Yeah. [There are voices in background] Would you be (--) Would you favor, let me put this as kind of abstractly as possible. There's something I'm trying to get at. Uh, say there was a union leader, [Whimpers?] or anybody else, and you happen to be in that union, you disagreed with a lot of political stands that that person was taking which weren't particularly relevant to your work, or whatever. You know, it sort of could be on civil rights issues, or [C: coughs] peace issues, foreign policy issues, whatever. Um, uh, would you (--) And, and somebody, oh well somebody wanted to lead a fight to replace that person. Uh, would you, would you be in favor of that kind of fight inside a union? Uh, there are those kinds of (--)

C: You mean during, during his administration?

G: Yeah, right. Yeah.

C: I, okay. I don't know how much about that, what I could do. If, depending who the person was I may, I'm not going to say yes, or no.

G: There, there have been all kinds of [unclear].

C: We have, we have uh, we have an election every four years. So it's not a, you know, so, and a mandatory retirement age. So you're eventually going to get rid of the guy anyway. [G: Yeah] And if he you know, it's like the uh (--)

G: So you sort of say, well let him, let him play it out and the heck with it, right?

C: Yeah. I feel, because it's not really going to (--) He maybe using our name, but he doesn't have the backing of the people. You know, it's not, you can't draw (--)

G: So it doesn't happen?

C: Yeah, I guess so. I think it's like these people now. They're saying, hey, the Congressmen ought to have a certain number of years. Uh, all you're doing is getting rid of the good Congressmen. [G: Umhm] You can get a bad one and get rid of every two years. If the people weren't so damn lazy and go out and get involved and vote [G: right] don't bitch about it. You know, all you're going to do is get rid of the good ones, because the bad one you know you get rid of every two years. That's the way I feel about that situation. And the union president you can get rid of every four years also. And a local president, one or two years. So whatever.

G: So you're a republican. Were you active in the republican party?

C: I'm treasurer of the Republican Town Committee in Clarksburg. Very [G: it's pretty active], it's not a very active party. [Laughs]

G: It's not a very active party.

C: No. I, I have money in the bank and every once in awhile I'll sent something to Shamey when he was running against Kennedy, or somebody. You know, [rest of comment unclear]. But uh, no, not that active. I will put a poster on my yard and things like that, and discuss issues with the guys in work, usually taking the conservative point of view. [G: Uh huh] When I agree with it. I mean I, you know, I could vote [unclear]. I mean I'm not, I don't, I wouldn't vote a solid republican line just because I'm republican. If I think the other fellow is better, naturally I'm going to vote for them. You know. I made a comment to [unclear] Conte this year that he ought to start acting like a republican down there. And he says, "what, after thirty years!" You know, he tells me. [Laughs] But you know, he's very liberal [G: yes] republican. It is like the southern democrat that's usually conservatives. They should be called, they should be called conservatives and liberals, not republicans and democrats, because some southern democrats are conservative and vice versa, you know. I don't have to explain that to you, you know, [unclear].

G: Um, besides you saying you go to church, how active in the church are you? Do you do

anything besides go to Mass, or?

C: I had been active in uh, in Western Massachusetts in the [unclear] campaign. Not as active as my pastor would like. He talks to me once in awhile. My wife would like to get more involved, but I haven't as yet.

G: When were you married?

C: In 1959.

G: And how did you meet your wife?

C: Uh, just met her in town, maybe at a restaurant.

G: She's from North Adams?

C: Yes. She was from North Adams at the time. Lived in Stanford, North Adams, Clarksburg, you know, but in from the area. [G: Um] She's four years younger than I am, so it wasn't in a school environment. Didn't know her from high school or anything. I just met her after.

G: Uh, besides the catholic church, the republican party and the IAM, uh do you belong to any other clubs, organizations, associations, civic groups, political groups, etc.?

C: No.

G: As a local and at the IAM when you were in, was it involved with any, in any kind of civic activity for the United Fund, or anything like that?

C: No, not, not really. We've, we've donated you know, if a request came to us and we may at our monthly meeting donate some money to a particular cause. We have the IM causes that the uh, seeing eye, you know the uh, [G: yeah] the dog and the uh, The City of Hope. The City of Hope I think they dropped because they went [laughs] [few words unclear], but you know, on an international level. It's just that those organizations now if the local, some local organization was, had a fund raiser or drive, we may, might have voted them some money, things like that. But not, we have not been that active as a broker. It's always been a small group. Very, and people from uh, not just from North Adams. At most times we've had four or five guys from Pittsfield uh, coming up here. Uh, we still have two from Pittsfield, Williamstown, Adams.

G: People have to travel.

C: Yeah, Adams. And it's been, it's one of the better, always been one of the better paying jobs since I've been involved [G: yeah] in town. Our pay rates have gone over to over fifteen dollars an hour in this contract we're in now. Some of the people. And uh, so we've drawn people from other communities. They will travel from Pittsfield for this job. And whereas you know, you're not coming up here to be a production worker usually from Pittsfield. [G: Right] In terms of engineer, yes. Management, yes, but not so low. [G: Umhm] And we always uh, if it was a

North Adams organization basically, but it isn't. It's from a lot of surrounding areas.

G: Uh, what (--) Where are your meetings?

C: Up until recently we've had them at the American Legion. We've rented a room from the American Legion. Being a small group we do not have a regular office, or building. [G: Umhm] And they've just raised the rent. So we've not been holding regular meetings. We've been doing it in the shop. There's only six or seven of us right there and we call the, I'd call the Research Center for the one guy there and say, "we've got this problem what do you want to do?" And we do it.

G: So you just call back and forth?

C: We call, we've been just doing it like that recently. And I've got to make sure with my International Rep that that's legal enough, you know. And he said, yeah, in a small group like that. Actually we wouldn't even have a local if we were close to another (--)

G: Right. [C: Uh] It would [cannot transcribe rest of comment-unclear]

C: Bigger, bigger like, yeah, a bigger, a bigger local we'd be put in that local. [G: Yeah] [Coughs] But most of them are (--) The closest one is [unclear] Machine in Turner's Falls of about sixty people. [G: Yeah] That's all. [Coughs] Excuse me.

G: Yeah. Uh, now what is, what is the constu (--) structure of, what are the, what's the sort of executive structure of your union there. You have a president and vice president and uh (--)

C: [Coughs] Recording secretary, uh, financial secretary, treasurer, and stewards. And a lot of jobs are (--)

G: Everybody is an officer?

C: Just about. Everybody has a job. Just about every, everybody has about just about a job. I think there's only one fellow who doesn't have a job.

G: [Laughs] So everybody is acting now.

C: Either a trustee, or (--) Just about everybody has to have a job at this time, yes. [G: Yeah] Yeah.

G: Um, [C: excuse me-coughs] are you all right? Do you want to stop and get a drink of water.

C: Uh, I got something here.

G: Um, do you personally have any uh, photographs or other memorabilia of the Marshall Street? I'm very actively searching this for [C: still coughing] various kinds of memorabilia.

C: I don't know that I have uh, or anybody (--) You know, I can check with the guys.

G: Sprague Logues, old Sprague Logues, or.

C: Yeah, we did have, uh, I don't know if any of the people have. I'll ask them.

G: I appreciate that. [C: Umhm] Um, how do you feel about Sprague pulling out of Marshall Street?

C: Uh, [coughs] maybe I will need [few words unclear].

G: Go ahead.

C: You know, what we were just talking about coming, while we had the break here. Uh, I think that's one of the reasons we've had to uh, had to break contracts and been able to get along with the company because of our International and the profession, professional people they send us as International Reps. They knew as much or more than the people they were dealing with from Sprague, because they were, it was from a big quality organization and I think that's what helped us a lot too. Whereas the other, I just didn't think with other two smaller Internationals they had the type, or as much training as our people did. [G: Uh huh, uh huh] And even though we were a small group, we had, somebody always went in with our, our guy. And he was very knowledgeable. [G: Umhm] And again, probably more knowledgeable, because they were just handling one union here and he was all over, you know?

G: You always brought in an International Rep?

C: Always when we had a serious problem.

G: Um, the question I asked when you started to choke, [both laugh] was, was uh, how did you feel, how did you feel about Sprague pulling out of Marshall Street?

C: No wonder why I choked! I'm still here. Uh, I personally thought that uh, if John Sprague and a few of the executives wanted to play "big shot" down on 128, so be it. No problem. Uh, you know, but I think what really hurt was when they, the move to Mansfield with, when they took the guts of the company, the, all those office personnel. All the women, young girls that ran the company nationwide, or worldwide, there was a corporate headquarters, anyone down there and they took some of the supervisors, but didn't take all of the people and they just, they just couldn't cut it. They, maybe they should have done it slower if they wanted to do that, or cleaned house in North Adams if they figured they, people built their empires and done it here. And I think they'd, they'd still be a better, they're doing, they did well last year, you know, Sprague analogies. We, shows in [unclear]. They gave us an extra bonus in it. So they did make money. But I thought they took a half a billion dollar company, you know, John Sprague and McInnis and a few of the people just under him, and ran it in the toilet to be frank. [Chuckles] And I think a lot of it was because of the uh, they took the guts, which was all of those office girls and shipped all their work out and they just couldn't handle it. They couldn't train the girls fast enough down there. They had a very big turnover. Where they had a captive

labor force here [G: uh huh] who knew their job and weren't going to go across the street and get a better job for better wages. And they, and they blew it. [G: Because it wasn't there] It wasn't there. [G: Yeah right] Sure, and this is, this is what happened. Uh, with our, us, a uh, we had about eight young apprentices and recent [unclear] graduates that walked out of here went to the GE for about two thousand dollars a year more, and GE was grateful to have them. They were, they were talking all of the, they could have got five or six more. Myself, I could have gone. They only [unclear] graduates. But they uh, they just walked out, went down to GE made more money. [G: Umhm] And a lot of people in Sprague did this. And it was when GE was building up their ordinance department, they brought in a lot of engineers and everything. But all of our toolmakers with the layoff at GE, they're still there, [G: umhm] because of their skill. So it really didn't affect our, our group as much. We had a lot of older guys that retired, and those guys went down there, and just everybody is doing better, adjusted well. But as far as uh, and I didn't think it hurt the IUE, the office union always had, whether they realized it or not, you know, the IUE always thought we're the biggest, we've got the power. [G: Umhm] If they went on strike they shut down one production plant basically, or two. When that office union went out, they shut down their whole corporate headquarters, they shut down everything. [G: unclear] It hurt everybody.

G: Where they were located in the production process.

C: Where they were located in you mean (--)

G: The structure of the organization .

C: The organization. It was corporate headquarters and they shut everything down when they, when the office union went out. And that's what, that's who had the power was the office union and not us being small, and not the IUE as much. The IUE would hurt them, but you're closing down one, one of their production plants, that's it. When their office union (--) And this is what really happened to them in Mansfield. They took their office, all of those office people down here are, moved the office responsibility down there and they couldn't handle it. My opinion, I don't know what the big experts are saying, but that's what I think.

G: How do you feel about MoCA?

C: I hope it goes. I uh, I uh, read a little bit about it. And you know, I've been following it. And I hope it goes for the area. Yeah, this is my area, I'd love to see something here. And you know, I want North Adams to do well. I want Sprague Electric to do well. And when Sprague does well, I do well here. I also sell real estate outside. I'm a licensed real estate broker. So when there's moves I sell houses, but I, but when the company is going good I sell more, you know? [G: Yeah] Uh, my opinion of MoCA, part of the reason it's here is that uh, I think their connection, I don't know if I'm saying it right, the Googenheim [G: yeah] Museum that Kren's is, was here, started this. Now he's the head of that. And reading in the papers um, about Googenheim and everything, how they can only show about a third of displays, killing them with the warehouse space. And New York being so high, it uh, it costs them a lot of money. It looks to me like it was wired. He starts this, goes down there and now he's got a warehouse to store the Googenheim's things up here in North Adams. It's, it's a thought. I don't know if this is it,



but I [G: yeah, uh huh] you know, this is what it looks like to me. So I mean I don't know if that's it. But great. If that's it, who cares as long as it helps North Adams. I mean that's, that's my feelings.

G: Uh, I pointed out at the beginning of the interview, this is basically the last, or the next to the last question. That, our, the notion of our job of the scholars and residences is to examine this, this idea of The Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts, 1920-1980. Every month all of the scholars from all the different locations get together and we talk about this. [C: umhm] And uh, I started talking, asking people, what does it mean the changing meaning of work? And nobody is quite sure. And they said what, what we need to do is ask people how their jobs changed and stuff. And I said, well why don't we ask people what they think? And oh well, you just get a blank stare. Uh, and uh [C: coughs] so I said no, I'm going to do it. So what I, you know I said the way to find this out, the reason, one of the reasons we're doing all of these interviews is to try and figure out the changing meaning of work in North Adams since 1920. [C: Umhm] I've asked this question to about a dozen people you know, and at least half of them say well what do you mean? My response to that is always, I'm not sure what I mean. You throw it right back in your lap. [C: laughs] You know, what do you think? How do you think, having said all of that, how do you think the meaning of work has changed in North Adams? If not from the 1920's since you weren't alive, then at least since you started to work. How does the meaning of work change, if at all, since you started?

C: Well we used to kid in the uh, when we were in the cotton mill up at Marshall Street. Say, we'd do a job you know, that was, we'd say, we'd joke, it's close enough for a cotton mill. You know, it's (--) [G: unclear] So now, maybe it's a trade joke, I don't (--) Other people (--)

G: [Comment unclear]

C: Yeah, yeah. But anyway, but uh, and now that we're down there, they got a brand new building down there and everything and now we can't say that. Now we're high tech now, we got to, you know, [Chuckles] we have better words for that. This is, you know, there saying that everything is high technology now. So now we're high technology. You're doing the same job, but we're down in a new plant, you know, and before we were in a cotton mill. I, the, I, I think that the uh, of course being in the trades the kids aren't going into it. And my own son uh, I wanted him to, he wanted to go to the vocational school. And I said, well you're going to take one of the higher, you know, he's in electronics, you know, and he was, or business data processing. You're going to get into one of the modern, [G: high tech] high tech, where the jobs are, you know? The service industries are great if you own a store, or if you, you know, but the, the working in it. And the old manufacturing jobs, where, you know, we've lost. The toolmaker, you know, was always the highest skill guy in the (--) The Master Electrician was, we were the highest class skill and we were you know, the highest paid and, and everything now. And this is a changing world now. You know, the kids aren't doing it. They don't know what a machine shop is. They don't know what a lathe is. They don't know, you know, all of these things. And uh, I just think it's uh, the, it's a , for a lot of the work force you got to make things idiot proof, and the other, the other half, or the other maybe third is going to really have to be educated [G: yeah] in your high tech. And I think that's where the work force has changed. Uh, maybe it was always that way in a, in a, not as a, as much of a defined you know, or big, or as big a gap. But I

think right now it's, when they're coming out of the high school either you're going on, you're going into a job where you're going to need a lot of education, or you're going to a job that you don't need much at all. And I think before there was again, the later. You had your this and your skills all the way down. I think a lot of it has to do with the uh, I always make the analogy with the plumber. Of all the crafts, maybe the, maybe the least skilled, [G: Umhm] but it's the dirtiest. They always made a lot of money. [G: Yeah] Yeah, you know, nobody's going to stick their hand in the toilet, whereas a guy uh, they'd pay a toolmaker who's working to two ten thousands of an inch maybe fourteen dollars an hour, but you're going to pay a plumber twenty dollars an hour, because you don't want to stick your hand in the toilet. [G: Right] You know, and uh, but I, but I think the uh, I think the gap is the education. And the ones that don't have it is, their job is you know, you really got to, you got to help them. You got to get them an easy, really uh, make, make what they do idiot proof. What we always say is when you're going to be making something to uh (--)

G: To the production workers?

C: Well, we used to say when you're, when you're, when you're making this machine or you're making this jig, you got to make it idiot proof. So they, there's no way to screw it. They got to do it one way and not screw it up. You know. And not that they were, but they were, they were trying to make bonus. So they're going fast and you had to make it so they went one way, you know? [G: Right] And uh, because they're always trying to beat, beat the system. [G: Right] You know, and we used to say make it idiot proof. You know, not trying to degrade them, you know, [Chuckles] and say hey, we're much smarter. But I guess it sounds racist. Not racist, but uh, you know, [G: yeah] elitist remark, but um, that did come up. You had to make it so they couldn't foul the thing up, you know. [G: Right] Because they're always trying to beat it. And a lot of women, [G: but that's, you see] but a lot of those women out there and I will admit freely were much more intelligent than I was probably, but you know, when they're trying to beat a, a bonus rate in something, they'd do anything they could. So you had to do things that way.

G: And you've been saying that they'll be more people like that now.

C: But I think that's why (--) There's going to be more people like that I think, because uh, and I think our education system shows it. While the Japanese and the [unclear], you know, we're falling further and further behind. And they're not getting into the trades as much. There isn't many trades either [unclear].

G: It's sort of an irony, Bob Diodati was pointing this out. He said that the kids that graduated from McCann will probably do well, but then there's uh, kids that graduated from Greylock, or Drury uh you know, they're uh, especially those who choose not to go to college, or just [few words unclear].

C: Yeah. This is, this is very true. He made a good point and I think I would want to make the same point. I have uh, friends of mine, their children say, "Gee I wish I went to McCann now." [G: Yeah] You know, they went to play sports at Drury, a better sports program, and now they're out you know, working in supermarkets. And there's these kids from McCann's who are, that are electricians, plumbers, computer people, [G: Yeah, right] that are making, that are doing

better. Again, a step below the doctor and lawyer that's coming out of Mt. Greylock, or Drury, or the you know.

G: But that's very few I'm sure.

C: Yeah, sure.

G: Uh, is there anything that you would like to add? This is basically, there's only one more other thing I may ask. Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation here?

C: I don't know. If we you know, we were talking about you know, just working at Sprague Electric. On the most part it's been very enjoyable for myself. I don't know if the other fellows have said that, [chuckles] but we've, I've had you know, again been pay wise one of the better jobs in town. Good working conditions and it's for the most part been you know, a good job. And not hated to go to work or anything. You know, it's uh, and I just hope that they hang on. You know, get me out into retirement. [Laughs]

G: Could you uh, are you in contact with people who were active in your, in your Lodge before you were, of an older generation say of any of the chartered members? Do you know any of them?

C: Our last charter member was, just had a stroke the other day.

G: Oh dear!

C: Yeah. Uh, we had two people who had strokes. It's the pressure of our job. Uh, and our last charter member, he was uh, I think he was out of trade school. He worked when he was sixteen. he used to come in nights. And then went in the Navy and continued with Sprague. He's got over forty-five years in the company. And he just had a stroke. He's sixty, he'd be sixty-four in May. And uh, he was the last chart, our last charter member. A few of the other ones (--)

G: There's none, none that's around that are alive?

C: There are one uh, of the original members, no. Some of the older fellows are still in the area.

G: Yeah. How about people, do you know of anybody who was sort of, not just a member, but more or less active in the union, who was say active in the fifties, or at least in the early sixties?

C: Not right now.

G: Nobody, nobody that goes back that far?

C: Uh, just this one fellow, but he just had a stroke. [G: Uh huh] And I could tell you more. Uh, there's Walter Baumert. He lives in [unclear] in Williamstown. He's a chartered member. He was, and he went into management later on. And uh, and he was active. [G: Uh huh] But other than that I uh, George Carval, but he's, he was, I think he was a chartered member, but he's

had a stroke. I don't think he could uh, he could talk to you. He's an older man. This uh, [coughs-excuse me] this Walter Baumert might be able to help you.

G: [Spells] B A U M E R T.

C: Baumert, something like that, yeah. [G: Yeah, okay] It's close enough. I think [few words unclear]. And that's about it, because everybody else, even though I'm one of the younger fellows still in our group, I'm still, have ten more times the service. [G: Yeah] I'm second from the top now on service. Fourth from the top, third from the top.

G: Try, I like to get at people who were around during the 19 (--) Well you were around during the 1970 strike, but you weren't active then. You've said that you didn't cross the picket line.

C: Well uh, except, yeah. And I did some picketing. I worked for the state during that time. [G: Uh huh] I had a friend who was an appointment secretary for Governor Sargent. So he got me a job in the Forest Rangers during the strike. [G: Uh huh] And I did my picketing at night and on the weekend, you know. [G: yeah] Yeah.

G: Yeah, well (--)

C: Um, there is one (--)

G: The people who were active in the disaffiliation from the ICU here.

C: Oh well, that's (--) Okay, now Lloyd Sanders, College Avenue, he was uh, he was active in the strike. He was on a committee and then 1970 on the strike. He just retired the other day. Uh, Joe Laura, he was [tape shuts off].

end of tape